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## "In the Footsteps of Ahiqar"

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The "Words of Ahiqar" is an ancient story about a wise Assyrian sage and member of the Assyrian royal court under the kings Sennacherib (704-681 BCE) and his son Esarhaddon (681-669 BCE) named Ahiqar. In the story, Ahiqar wants to retire and since he has no son, he trains his unscrupulous nephew Nadim to succeed him. Ahiqar is then betrayed by Nadim, and nearly killed by king Esarhaddon. He then goes into hiding while crafting a clever plan that ultimately succeeds and vindicates him, restoring him to power while Nadim is then punished. The biographical narrative is then followed by the wisdom attributed to him in the form of proverbs.

The earliest extant text comes from an early Egyptian Jewish settlement called Elephantine and dates from around 475-400 BCE. This is the only extant text written in Aramaic, though later extant versions exist in a multitude of other languages. Some versions have been lost over time, while others, such as the Greek version, exist only in fragments today. It is the Elephantine version that will be the main focus of this research paper, with a comparison to the later Romanian, Turkish, Syriac, and Arabic versions of the story.

The Elephantine text has two distinct sections. The first section is a narrative concerning the story of Ahiqar himself. The second section contains proverbs and is written in a style similar to other wisdom literature of the period. These similarities will also be examined in this research paper. Interestingly, the proverbs section has almost nothing in common with the first section, and there are no references to the narrative part of the story at all (although later versions do not share this trait). Also noteworthy is the generally poor condition of the Elephantine text, which has led to some variation in how it has been (or could be) translated.

The story of Ahiqar is of relevance to us because of its influences on sacred texts of Judaism, Christianity, and even Islam, along with its displaying relationships to historically-important texts such as Aesop's Fables and the apocryphal Book of Tobit. The story seems to have been influential in a number of societies in the ancient world, and traces of that influence can still be glimpsed today.

The focus of this research paper therefore is twofold; the primary focus is on the literary analysis on the text itself. This analysis is mainly on the Elephantine text with some analysis done on sections in the narrative portion of some of the later versions (in particular for sections lost from the extant Elephantine text such as the portion containing the ending). The secondary focus is on the historical value of the text. This includes the history of the text itself and the community at Elephantine from where it originated and how it may have influenced (or was itself influenced by) other texts throughout history. Also some of the purported origins of the Ahiqar story will be considered, relevant because of the historical importance of the story (and of the wider significance of wisdom literature in general). Understanding the origin of Ahiqar might ultimately elucidate how the story traveled the crossroads of the ancient world to ultimately find its way into an ancient Jewish community at Elephantine.